University of California, Santa Cruz

The Naypyidaw Rationale:

Cultures of Power and Constructions of Legitimacy in the Republic of Myanmar

June 2015

Nic Zinter

Senior Thesis

Dept. of Politics

A note on the terminology: The official title of the Burmese state as specified by the 2008 Constitution is "The Republic of the Union of Myanmar," although the use of "Myanmar" to designate the territory formerly known as "Burma" was a move to push out colonial influence after the Burmese Security Forces initiated a violent coup d'état in 1988 responding to a series of student uprisings and popular protests. While the majority of major news outlets refer to this nation as Myanmar, the designation of Burma is still used by a coalition of governments, including that of the United States, that refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the now-vacated military government. In spite of the dissolution of the military *junta* in 2011, the current government of Myanmar led by Thein Sein upholds the name "Myanmar" and continues to rule from the junta-designated capital at Naypyidaw. As such, I use the designations of "Myanmar" and "Burma" throughout the course of this paper – not to make any sort of political statement for or against the current government of Myanmar. Rather, when discussing issues pertaining specifically to the government, I use the term "Myanmar;" when discussing the peoples or the territory within Myanmar's national boundaries, or the historic kingdoms or colonies that predate the *junta*, I utilize the term "Burma."

On 6 November 2005, at the decidedly auspicious time of 6:37 a.m., the capital of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar was moved from Yangon, the site of tumultuous protest, democratic movements, and political upheaval, to the barren grasslands of a territory known as Pyinmana, which at the time had a population just shy of one hundred thousand. Senior General Than Shwe ordered the new capital dubbed *Naypyidaw*, or "Seat of the King," which was to be the name of his new abode. It is replete with highways, a zoo, hotels, a diplomatic quarter (which remains empty with the exception of the Bangladeshi embassy), a national theme park, and official buildings belonging to the government and to the military, which mobilized from Yangon to Naypyidaw at the advice of astrologers at 11:11 a.m., on 11 November 2005.[1] The crown jewel of this contrived metropolis is the Uppatasanti Pagoda, named for a *sūtra* that invokes the protection of the Buddha from the threat of foreign invasion. All things considered, nothing should surprise the informed, common viewer about the fervently nationalist features of this new capital, built to glorify the idyllic "Burmese" past and to cushion the government from foreign and domestic encroachment. However, the Naypyidaw transition does not mark a mere continuity of the past in a different location. We can view Naypyidaw as the hallmark of contemporary Burmese political culture, one which utilizes conventions of the past, including antiquated notions of kingship and astrological events, to give a Burman (*not* "Burmese") flavor to the government in light of a changing political dynamic. Put shortly, the period of Naypyidaw will be one which, though founded largely on principles of the military junta, will likely filter language of democratization and reform through endemic structures of power.

Just as President Thein Sein has governed democratically from his "seat of the king" in Naypyidaw to deny suffrage to monks and ethnic minorities, we can expect his military

[1] Benedict Rogers, *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010), 73.

successor to use what I call the “Naypyidaw rationale,” one of defense, authority, xenophobia, and tradition to shelter his fragile state from the movements that shook its foundations in 1988 and in 2007. By removing itself from Yangon, the government’s move to Naypyidaw represents a retreat to the center, sanctimoniously claiming its own legitimacy from the geographic center while conceding the Shwedagon Pagoda to the legacy of Aung San Suu Kyi and her late father. This is not to say that Naypyidaw was a defeat for the regime – rather, Naypyidaw was a tactic, one which has the potential to be used by the military regime to preserve its own authority by making claims on an officially-narrated past.

My intention in this paper is to designate modes by which the government of Myanmar maintains its own political authority by using Burmese cultural expectations to claim legitimacy in governance. The opinions and experiences of the Burmese peoples have, as has been chronicled tirelessly for dozens of years, been markedly different from what the state claims to be ethical and legitimate rule. My concern in this paper is to understand what the state considers to be “ethical” or “legitimate,” a designation which has changed the dynamic of political leadership to the tune of international sanctions, regime change, and claims on an official history. The Naypyidaw rationale, in sum, is one which creates and reinforces four modes of upholding regime legitimacy amid the scrutiny of the international community: the state as a nonsecular entity with a specific set of religious fulfilments and cultural duties to uphold; the state as a military body which continues to utilize the *Tatmadaw* (Burmese Armed Forces) in order to maintain law and order; the state as an ethnocentric governing body which, despite ongoing talks over the past decade, battles ethnic insurgency from the periphery while ignoring the structural issues of socio-economic disenfranchisement among the nation’s ethnic and religious minorities;

and the state as the sole interpreter of democracy despite global demands for socio-political and economic reform.

I will begin this paper by introducing the Burmese government as an entity which espouses religion, namely Burmese adaptations of Buddhism, as a major component of its nationalist doctrine. Citing the importance of Buddhism in the sensibilities and practical lives of a majority of Burmese people, I argue that religion is used as a method of consolidating state control over civil institutions by using sponsorship of the monastic community and an official narration of Buddhist royal history as a legitimizing backdrop of the state's current social position. Demonstrating the compatibility of military, kingship, and religion in Burma, I then move on to argue that the state in Myanmar is by and large a military institution, due to the *tatmadaw*'s continued presence in governing bodies. I will briefly discuss the military's role in the nation's postcolonial development as a backdrop to the military regime that dominated the latter half of the 20th century. Then, interpreting the causes of the *junta*'s collapse in 2011, I will examine contemporary state institutions and the military's role in their functioning. From there, I go on to discuss Burma's ethnic plurality and the role that ethnic minorities play in the evolving role of democratic elections and military insurgency. I conclude this section with an analysis of the state's shortcomings in its treatment of ethnic minorities like the Kokang and the Rohingya, interpreting the variety of challenges that Myanmar's future leadership will face after the elections scheduled for November of this year. Finally, I discuss the troublesome role of "democracy" in Burma, from western interpretations to Burmese political understandings within a military culture. I begin by examining the claims for democracy and demilitarization espoused by the Saffron Revolution and then contrast this with the at-times disastrous mode of decentralization initiated in the post-*junta* state. Then, analyzing the provisions of the 2008

Constitution, I conclude the paper by examining which portions of the government we can expect to change, and by what means we can expect that change to come about.

The State as Non-secular

The state's contemporary use of the "Naypyidaw rationale" to maintain some semblance of national unity takes root in the religious history of Burma, an aspect of society which has become intertwined with politics over the past thousand years. The relationship between religion and state in Myanmar (Burma) represents a complex social interplay, one which has been shaped by over a millennium of dynasties, battles, popular movements, and contestations of power and authority. The Burmese populace, as of 2014, is 89% Buddhist -- the third largest national figure worldwide for Buddhists behind only Thailand and Cambodia, where Buddhism is the official religion. Although Myanmar has no official religion,[2] Theravāda Buddhism is certainly the *de facto* religion of the state, shaping the scope of national welfare programs, state sponsorship of rituals and restoration projects, and the geopolitical role that Buddha relics play in national state legitimacy. As Juliane Schober argues, "in the Theravāda Buddhist world, religion is necessarily at once political and religious… propagating the Buddha's dispensation is a cultural discourse that transcends historical contexts, but at the same time it harbors great political potential that is difficult to control."[3] This potential is made manifest in the fact that, in contrast to the overwhelmingly secular political culture of the West, there is no expectation for the state to play a secular role or to distance itself from Buddhist institutions in the eyes of an overwhelming majority of Burmese citizens. Considering the profound role that Theravāda Buddhism plays in the history of mainland Southeast Asia, it is useful to consider Buddhism in Burma as a social

[2] Despite U Nu's attempts to institute Buddhism as Burma's official religion in the 1950s, his efforts proved fruitless after Ne Win's *coup d'état* spelled out the terms of U Nu's exile and Burma's transition to a socialist state.
[3] Juliane Schober, *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2011), 77.

construct unique to Burmese adaptations of Buddhist worldview rather than viewing Burmese society as a faithful reproduction of a monolithic ideology we call "Buddhism."

Burmese Buddhism and Local Adaptations

Burmese Buddhism itself is a patchwork of indigenous, pre-Buddhist practices combined with the orthodox precepts of Theravāda Buddhism, which dominate the religious landscape of Southeast Asia. A plurality, if not a majority, of individuals in Myanmar also believe in *nats* regardless of religious background, tradition, or practice. Nats are spirits, vestiges of pre-Buddhist animism, which were organized by the Pagan-era Buddhist king Anawrahtaminsaw into a pantheon of thirty-seven. Each of these nats are said to have met violent deaths at the hands of powerful kings, which emulates the tradition of kingship and mythic history in the everyday practice of Burmese ritual veneration. The relative lack of scholarship around this syncretic practice is due largely to its stigma as a "superstition," a practice which supposedly contradicts Buddhism as an orthodox practice. Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière offers a far more useful explanation of *nat* worship used in conjunction with Theravāda Buddhism in Burma as a "highly sophisticated structure of the cult ritual system."[4] Indeed, the incorporation of a living narrative of kingship and power politics is a crucial component of understanding the significance of *nats* in everyday Burmese religious veneration. The *nats*, figments of a mythic but politically-grounded historic imagination, become incorporated in the traditional schema of Theravāda Buddhism via widespread ritual veneration. This approach to Burmese-style Buddhism as a complex, sophisticated system of ritual produces a more fruitful and realistic outlook on this complex but fascinating system of belief – one which has intertwined with cultures of power and military domination for over a millennium.

[4] Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "The Spirit-possession Cult in the Burmese Religion," (Paris: CNRS-LASEMA, 2008).

While the Buddhist majority of Myanmar scarcely objects to the Buddhist framework of contemporary Burmese politics (with the notable exception of persecuted non-Buddhists within Burma, including but certainly not limited to the Christian Kachin and the Muslim Rohingya, which will be addressed in subsequent sections), the state must be understood as a product of Burmese culture and not of "orthodox" Buddhist doctrine. Echoing the ages-old adage "To be Burmese is to be Buddhist,"[5] the state's current treatment of social and political issues is often framed in the Buddhist cosmological schema. As Ingrid Jordt argues, the government of Myanmar utilizes local adaptations of Buddhism to fulfill "lost functions of kingship," a mode of governance which is made manifest in state-sponsored religious ceremonies, rituals which she argues are "a vital component of Burmese statecraft."[6] The Burmese state's use of religion is of a twofold advantage to political actors: first, using the *Dharma* (the Buddha's teachings) to interpret nationhood and identity appeals widely to a nation which was founded and decolonized according to Buddhist principles[7]; second, social (and spiritual) capital gained in Buddhist state ceremonies culminate in the acquisition of merit, an ethereal but indispensable notion in the Buddhist world, upon which the state and its actors build a base of legitimacy. The participation of the *saṅgha* (the Noble Community of monastics and devoted practitioners), on which Burmese governments have relied for over a millennium, gives cohesion and legitimacy to these state ceremonies. Put simply, the goals of society are translated into a culturally-appealing language by state actors with vested interests in boosting their own social position. By sponsoring Buddhism as the de facto religion of the state and by organizing and protecting the *saṅgha*, the

[5] An antinationalist slogan, this sentiment is echoed by state actors and authors to this day. See Steinberg 2006:83.
[6] Ingrid Jordt, *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power* (Athens, OH: Center for International Studies at Ohio University, 2007), xiv.
[7] Largely acknowledged as the first "Burmese" empire, the Pagan (or *Bagan*) Kingdom was founded in the Irawaddy River Valley during the 9th century CE by the Buddhist King Anawrahtaminsaw. Likewise, anticolonial movements of the 1940s used Buddhism as a "rallying point for a shared national identity" (Jordt 24), successfully gaining independence from the British in 1948.

government of the Union of Myanmar consolidates its claims on legitimate rule while allowing its own actors to rise to prominence in social spheres through ritual and patronage.

The Origin Myth

One cannot fully grasp the nature and impact of citizenship and nationalist construction without first understanding the national "origin myth." Nations new and old are fraught with imagery that alludes to their genesis: be it out of struggle, out of war, out of decolonization, or out of empire. The origin myth of Myanmar, unsurprisingly, is a combination of each of these facets of nationhood; one which, as Burmese-American scholar Michael Aung-Thwin notes, has "shaped the analytical framework" for the creation of its own national history, and in doing so has "validated part of the agenda in the political debates of the twentieth century (and currently) regarding the future configuration of the Burmese nation."[8] The framework of the Burmese origin myth is a patchwork of rhetoric that details mythic maritime battles, goodly Buddhist kings, quests for relics, ethnic pluralism, the devastation of colonialism, and an undying quest to better the lives of all Burmese people through economic progress, religious liberation, and national defense. In doing so, the Burmese nation projects its own interpretation of history into the future, vowing a return to the spirit of the fabled kings of Pagan with a modern twist of pragmatism.

The origin myth of Burma is narrated actively through a series of strategically-placed monuments, either constructed specifically to focus on the splendor of Burma's ancient royal past or to glorify the monuments that remain from history through costly restoration. Nothing better exemplifies the former than the famed "three kings" statue in Naypyidaw, commissioned by Than Shwe himself in the twilight of his junta leadership. The monumental sculpture depicts

---

[8] Michael A. Aung-Thwin, *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices* (Athens, OH: Center for International Studies at Ohio University, 1998), 6.

three kings: Anawrahtaminsaw of the Pagan Kingdom, Bayinnaung of the Toungoo Dynasty, and Alaungpaya of the Konbaung Dynasty. Commemorated for the three great unifications of Burma, the statue represents more than merely a gesture towards national unity; it is an implication of Than Shwe as their heir in his "seat of the kings" in central Burma. While Anawrahta took the devout role of *dhammarāja* to assert his royal leadership on a religious base, Bayinnaung maintained the largest empire in Southeast Asian history by "making relentless war, unleashing campaigns of great brutality and destruction until one day all of western mainland Southeast Asian acknowledged his sovereignty."[9] Likewise, Alaungpaya, the last to unite the peoples of Burma and parts of Siam under his military kingdom, was known for his ruthless military styles that, according to Htin Aung, inspired a warrior-like thirst for imperial expansion that brought about their very downfall to British troops over seventy years after Alaungpaya's rule.[10] Seeing himself as the heir apparent to their fabled monarchical feats, Than Shwe's techniques as a military leader and political actor become more pronounced amid his ongoing desire, even after his abdication of Naypyidaw, to emulate the glorified past of Burma.

Indeed, the construction of Naypyidaw literally overnight did much to fulfill Burma's historic political aims according to Than Shwe's military rule, which became at once religious and geopolitical with his acquisition of a historically-significant Buddha tooth relic from China. The political and military strides to acquire a similar tooth relic are set into the walls of the stūpas of the ancient city of Pagan, Burma's first capital. According to an English translation of these inscriptions, Anawrahta led a military campaign to Sri Lanka to acquire the tooth relic from the Tarop Kingdom of Gandhala. He implores, "If I ask that holy tooth from the Tarop Utibwa and make it an object of worship to all beings, the religion will shine exceedingly and all

[9] Thant Myint-U, *River of Lost Footsteps*, 63; *in* Rogers 2010:166.
[10] Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Burma* (New York: Columbia UP, 1967), 172-3.

creatures will be profited throughout the five thousand years of the religion."[11] Anawrahta here is figured as the hero of a prophecy that Buddhism would thrive in Burma for five thousand years, contingent on the acquisition of a Buddha relic – he is, however, denied his request by the god Śākra and took with him instead a "frontlet-relic" which would dispense the Buddha's teachings in Burma from its protective stūpa in Pagan.[12] Here we see stūpas and relics figured not only for their symbolic strength in propagating Buddhist teachings, but for their geopolitical significance in protecting the realm in which it is situated. Than Shwe's acquisition of another tooth relic, thus, was seen as a victory for him as a leader, accomplishing what was denied to even the god-like Anawrahta. His decision to house the relic in a pagoda at Naypyidaw thus not only ensured validity to his new capital with the presence of a Buddha body,[13] but offered the preservation of his entire realm by invoking the Buddha's protection from foreign invasion. Hence, Uppatasanti (literally, "protection against calamity") Pagoda, in housing the fabled relic, became the crown jewel of Naypyidaw as a guarantor of law and order for the coming generations of Burmese political and military leadership.

Equating Buddhist kings with military monarchs known for their bloodthirst in war is by no means an aberration attributed to Than Shwe's strongman military rule. It is rather a representation of the ingrained military culture in Southeast Asia, one which holds a special significance for Burma in its position throughout history – having waged war with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, and Mongol invaders. Burma's geographic position at the crossroads of South and East Asia poses with it unique challenges that have been met with all-the-more

[11] Trans. Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce, "Of the journey to the Tarop country in the kingdom of Gandhala, and the asking of the sacred tooth," in *Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976), 134.
[12] Ibid.
[13] According to Buddhist doctrine, Buddha relics, representations, and even Buddhist texts are treated literally as the Buddha body and are capable of dispensing merit and protection in the act of their ritual veneration.

unique responses: using the protection of the military, the monarch, and the Buddha body to shield the realm from the persistent threat of invasion or attack.

Military Veneration

The active participation of military actors in state rituals and observances is difficult to ignore, and it cannot be denied that despite recent regime change, Burmese cultural religious trends continue to reify military strongmen within the temple grounds. This is not to say that the military is strongly figured in any mainstream Buddhist tradition – this is another cultural adaptation of Buddhist spheres of influence given the military's pronounced role throughout the history of Burma and other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. Military patronage of the Dharma has been chronicled in Burma for over a millennium,[14] and its continuation is guaranteed nowadays by and large through state-controlled media, which "daily catalogue the activities of the military leadership in their *appropriate* activities of paying due respect or obeisance to the *saṅgha* or building or repairing of pagodas."[15] The word "appropriate" here is a subtle reminder of the intended image of the armed forces as protectors of the realm through the acquisition of merit – a lofty yet central concept of Theravāda Buddhism which governs the scope of *karma* gained on behalf of oneself and all intended beings in the field of merit (or, *puñña ksetta* in Pāli). The act of acquiring merit requires the saṅgha as a mediator for creating and perpetuating state legitimacy, something which is negotiated through the hierarchies of lay, military, and state patronage in merit-making ceremonies:

> In a manner that simultaneously evoked the precolonial social order and socialist worker collectives, professional organizations contributed donations to the sangha and shared in the merit the state's leadership had engendered on their behalf… This strategy increased the power of the state and limited the role of individual donors within the ritual economy of merit. It validated the military for providing the population

---

[14] See Pe Maung Tin and G.H. Luce's 1976 translation of the Konbaung-era "Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma" for more on the subject.

[15] David I. Steinberg, *Turmoil in Burma: Contested Legacies in Myanmar* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2007), 83. Emphasis added.

> with opportunities to make merit and undermined the moral legitimacy of those voices that were critical of the state's policies.[16]

Schober's analysis points us in a crucial direction to understanding Burmese politics as a non-secular phenomenon. Media portrayals of merit-making ceremonies project a vision of the state as a karmic protector of the realm, harkening back to the *dhammarāja* ruling styles of the nation's precolonial past while protecting and promoting the right of its citizens to acquire merit on its own terms. Meanwhile, the centrality of the military in sponsoring these ceremonies promotes a vision of the military as an entity that promotes the spiritual growth of the nation through gentle domestic patronage and fierce protection of the homeland. Hence, it should come as little surprise that the military didn't quite know how to react to monks young and old marching against state violence on the streets of Yangon in 2007 (another example of the cognitive dissonance of "democracy" in Burma – the perspective of the state and that of the general populace). The military's ongoing presence in Buddhist ritual and merit-making is a way of bolstering its image as a *kuthou shin*, or "owner of merit," to which other lay donors (and, by extension, the Buddhist majority of Burma) owe a debt of gratitude,[17] one which is eventually paid off through the complex social network of patron-clientelism.

Structures of Power in Burmese State Religion

The use of Buddhism by the state to its own ends is a lucrative opportunity for state actors to reframe their personal and political goals within the language and norms of Theravāda Buddhism. One prominent example of this is the state's reorganization of the *saṅgha* into nine *nikāya*, or schools of thought. The number nine would become a favorite of Ne Win, who first implemented this mode of organization by convening the State Saṅgha Mahānayaka Council (a

[16] Schober 2011:88.
[17] Ibid, 89.

governing body of high-status monks controlled by the "secular" socialist state) in 1980.[18] After the *sui coup* of the late 1980s, Ne Win's organization of the saṅgha into nine nikāya became codified into SLORC Law 20/90, also called the Law Concerning Saṅgha Organizations, in 1990.[19] The ongoing enforcement of the nine nikāya law by the state-run Mahānayaka Council has led to the disrobing of several unaffiliated monks to this day, many of whom were denounced by the state and saṅgha following their involvement in the 2007 Saffron Revolution. A famous example of this denunciation is that of Htin Kyaw, a layperson whose participation in the 2007 protests prevented him from becoming ordained as a monk in Yangon that same year.[20] Despite the abbot's confidence in Kyaw's sincerity of resolve to join the monastic order, he was forbidden to do so according to the tenets of SLORC Law 20/90. To this day Myanmar continues to enforce laws propagated by the military junta in spite of its apparent dissolution nearly four years ago. Kyaw's restriction from the Buddhist clergy is one of many cases of direct government interference in the monastic community, which has led to the excommunication and occasional disappearance of monks perceived as "charismatics" or "dissidents."

This very law, enacted more than two decades ago, has not yet been applied to the case of Ashin Wirathu, a charismatic monk known for his anti-Islamic rhetoric, violence against the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority, and sexist remarks toward a U.N. peacekeeper who visited

[18] Despite his secular reputation, Ne Win was known for his superstition, and famously shot his mirror with a pistol at the advice of soothsayers. Ne Win's affinity for the number 9 culminated in his infamous move to make all currency divisible by 9 and nullify existing currency. The general populace, which mostly held its savings in cash, publicly railed against these measures, prompting the beginning of the 1988 "8888" Movement.

[19] Peter Gutter, "Law and Religion in Burma," in *Legal Issues on Burma Journal*, No. 8. April 2001. http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/LIOB08-pgutter.law%20andreligion.htm. Accessed online 31 May 2015. NOTE: This law declares the State Saṅgha Mahānayaka Council to be "the only one Sangha organization" in Burma, with its chairman wielding the title of "Supreme Patriarch in Burma" (Ibid).

[20] U.S. Department of State. "Burma" *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Accessed online 13 April 2015.

Myanmar in January of this year.[21] While Wirathu has been condemned by the international community for his widely-publicized comments and vigilante reputation, it is worth noting that the state's role in this issue has been vastly misinterpreted. BBC commenters insist that the government's potential to denounce fundamentalist monks like Wirathu is hindered by the saṅgha's "powerful political lobby in Myanmar."[22] We must be cautious, however, of any such scholarship that equates the Burmese political schema to that of the United States or Britain. The rule of the Burmese state is by and large absolute despite recent language of reform, and the suggestion that monks within or outside of the nine designated nikāya possess any lobbying power over military or civilian government actors is completely unfounded.[23] To be sure, Wirathu is seen within Burma (Myanmar) as a charismatic, both outside of the accepted nikāya and without legitimacy or appeal outside of a very small, fundamentalist circle in the Rakhine state. We must view the state's silence on this issue not as reflective of some kind of coercive presence that the saṅgha "lobby" holds in the Burmese government (monks cannot even vote in Myanmar), but as a media tactic of the state. By using Wirathu and his xenophobic 969 Movement as a red herring for the international press to focus on, the government led by Thein Sein is seen primarily as accountable for incidents of sectarian violence on its northwestern borders rather than facing larger external pressure to overhaul Myanmar's ailing institutions that are antiquated vestiges of the military regime.

While many Westerners may see the promulgation of Buddhist doctrine by a contemporary military junta as an ironic discrepancy, military rule supported by a religious ethos

---

[21] BBC, "UN condemns Myanmar monk Wirathu's 'sexist' comments," 22 January 2015. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30928744. Accessed online 13 April 2015.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Although many scholars see the potential for a decreasing role of the military in Myanmar (namely, Robert Taylor and Stuart Larkin), it is plain to see that the military continues to exercise state authority in Burma's cities and border lands. For more on the subject, see *Making Enemies* (2005) by Mary Callahan or *Turmoil in Burma* (2006) by David I. Steinberg.

has been a commonplace political tactic in mainland Southeast Asia for over a millennium. Militant behavior is pervasive in the historiographic records of revered Buddhist kings like Anawrahta and Narathihapade; credited in popular folklore with the destruction of monasteries to protect from Chinese invasion, Narathihapade was known for having fled to Lower Burma in a wake of militant destruction, while the exploits of Anawrahta to procure a tooth relic from Sri Lanka are replete with tales of human hostages, forced seizure of ships, and violent attacks on villages and towns.[24] The violence of these monarchs has been legitimated by their own moral higher ground above foreign invaders, a rhetoric which has perhaps influenced the xenophobic attitude of the current military regime. All the while deriding the materialism of western societies, "the military regime's patronage of Buddhism provided an alternate source of legitimation and transformed a national community into a ritual network to ensure stability and future prosperity."[25] The current regime acting officially under the auspices of a popular religion thus attempts to give cohesion to a society that would otherwise be fractured by ethnic or regional differences (in spite of the very real presence of non-Buddhists across the Burmese social landscape).

While the state certainly cannot ensure its success on the Buddhist platform alone, it builds its ethos as a governing body upon this familiar source of spirituality and ethics. Having built its base of legitimacy on the religious tenets of Burmese kingship, the state utilizes the military to its ends of preserving national unity and reinforcing state legitimacy. Whether in the ancient historical records of the Pagan empire or in modern-day military propaganda, the military in Myanmar serves the nation as both a component of the government itself and the enforcer (with an emphasis on "force") of the Naypyidaw rationale in Burma's countryside.

[24] Aung-Thwin 1998:5-9.
[25] Schober 2011:86.

The State as a Military Body

Naypyidaw's tactical position at the geographic center of Burma would perhaps be nothing without the military to disseminate its laws and doctrines across the political landscape. The value placed on the military by the government of Myanmar is best explained with the history as the narrator. Burma's position at the crossroads of India, Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Laos, and the Bay of Bengal has led it to engage in maritime and land battles for supremacy in the age of empires, while colonization seems to have taught the contemporary government that just as arms helped the British maintain control of Burma, they could also succeed in keeping future invaders at bay. Indeed, the firmness of military presence in nearly every Burmese state institution leads us to believe that little has changed from this mindset. We must, however, treat military presence in the Republic of Myanmar as a response to the changing dynamic of geopolitics in the twenty-first century; seeing the dangers of religious fundamentalism from nations to its west and the growing armies all around its borders, it makes sense that Myanmar would hold on to its military body to keep steadfast against the new threats it is facing in a globalized world. The nature of the military has changed significantly from its past functions of staving off the dangerous "other" and rattling off jingoist rhetoric to reinforce antiquated notions of the nation-state. The current role of the *tatmadaw*, or Burmese Armed Forces, is indeed to provide protection from the perceived imminence of foreign attack and to reinforce a hue of nationalist zeal, similar to that which has existed since the former half of the twentieth century. We must, however, understand this changing role of the military within the context of a post-junta state.

The *tatmadaw* as we now know it can be described perhaps best as a conglomerate military body that wields institutional political power as a presence in the parliamentary *hluttaw*,

ideological power in the maintenance of state propaganda in the contested site of Yangon (Rangoon), and the power of force through its presence in Burma's myriad ethnic minority regions. The increasing demands on the *tatmadaw* by the state to maintain Myanmar's stability reflects that the political arena in Burma is dramatically shifting – as such, it is my intention to preface this section by examining the history and authority of the *tatmadaw* as a dynamic guarantor of state legitimacy and ideological stability, not as a static body of violent force that is consistently operating behind a well-maintained veil of nationalist jargon.

The Heirs of History

The current mode of establishing state legitimacy upon idyllic notions of past kings and empires takes root in the role of the *tatmadaw* as a state-building functionary in the postcolonial era. Mary Callahan usefully designates this relationship between military and state throughout history as that of "warriors as state-builders,"[26] which provides us with a clearer sense of the conditions under which a military coup would take place in 1962 (and later in 1988). The military operated as a multi-use task force, whose myriad functions included but were not limited to "law enforcement, economic regulation, tax collection, census taking, magazine publishing, political party registration, food aid distribution, and so on."[27] The enduring relevance of these functions are mirrored even today in the contemporary government despite its being perceived as independent of direct military rule; political parties are still forbidden from criticizing other political parties and the *tatmadaw*, while law enforcement, in urban centers and in ethnic minority regions alike, is delegated to the ranks of the military. Most outstanding, however, was the *tatmadaw*'s role in limiting the notion of pluralism from entering Burmese political culture, a tactic that goes back to the Burman kings of centuries ago. The authority of the state reaches into

[26] Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003), 172.
[27] Ibid 205.

every facet of daily life – from economics to religion – and those perceived as outsiders are left with few outlets to voice their own grievances. Even the historic British policy of "divide and rule," which outlined ethnic divisions along Burma's diverse terrain, remains a significant factor in the *tatmadaw*'s contemporary mistrust of non-Burman ethnic minorities.[28] Although the state has continually struggled against British colonial ideology and its vestiges in Burmese power structures, the paradigm of Burman ethnic supremacy is one that extends through history, from 20th century colonialism to the days of Anawrahtaminsaw and his sprawling kingdom in the Irrawaddy river valley.

The military, riding the momentum of history, has built itself up as the creator of the modern Burmese state at the expense of minority ethnicities and ideologies. Starting in the 1950s, before the military coup and the dawn of the "Burmese Way to Socialism," the military gave shape to its campaign against ideological plurality with the publishing of *Myawaddy*, a magazine that served as the mouthpiece for the *tatmadaw* and the nascent Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League amid the tumult of the Cold War. On a broader scale, moreover, the magazine represented a larger campaign for the military to develop "its own official chronicles to claim a political legacy in Burma's independence struggle as a counter to communist dominance in Burma's ideological warfare."[29] Espousing the doctrine of the military in conjunction with the evolving goals of the state, *Myawaddy* represented a cross-section of interests during Burma's state building period. Touting national unity, anticommunism, and the nation's rich history (with a predictable twist of ethnocentrism), the magazine did more than further an ideology – it established the building blocks for the consolidation of military control over media outlets and state institutions. By creating a culture and ideology that is uniform throughout Myanmar, the

---

[28] David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 20.
[29] Bo Bo, "Raising Xenophobic Socialism against a Communist Threat," in *Cultures at War*, ed. Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2010), 183.

tatmadaw continues to enforce the state's notions of historicity and nationalism by chronicling official histories through a military mouthpiece.

The Narrators of History

The centrality of the origin myth is difficult to ignore, especially for Myanmar, which currently claims three: that of Anawrahta, that of Bayinnaung, and that of Alaungpaya – all of whom are enshrined in the Naypyidaw "three kings" monument and whose fabled lives are chronicled in the *Tatmadaw* Museum in Yangon. This is an apt representation of each city: Naypyidaw as the crown jewel that monumentalizes official histories and Yangon as the official narrator of the nation's history, being the current hub of the Burmese military propaganda campaign. From Yangon to Naypyidaw, it is not an uncommon spectacle to see bilingual billboards plastered with military slogans like "Tatmadaw *and the People – Cooperate and Crush All Those Harming the Union*."[30] All this is representative of the complex schema that the military has set up for nearly the past century – the *tatmadaw* has been instrumental in mobilizing the masses with twentieth-century nationalism and a common ideology. Now that the regime has officially crumbled, there remains little change because the attitudes held about the military and the nation are simply not bound to change overnight, not even in the three and a half years that have passed since Thein Sein's ascension to the newly-created position of the presidency. This fact remains relevant nowadays not in the propaganda that plasters urban centers with military slogans, but the sentiment gained from it: everyone in Burma knows what they mean by the "union" and what kind of transgressions could be perceived as "harmful" to that very nationalist construct. By using the military's logic to define right and wrong, theirs and not-theirs, the nation and the outside, and the citizen and the foreigner, the influence of the *tatmadaw* has instilled its own national and ideological ethos into the mentality of over fifty-five

[30] Rogers 2010:78. This particular sign comes from a billboard on the streets of Mandalay.

million individuals. This is certainly not to say that the Burmese do not possess their own will – the peacock flag of the NLD and the saffron robes in 2007 remind us of this fact – rather, that the *tatmadaw* has inserted itself into Burma's evolving construct of national culture, intending not just to be written into history, but to do the writing of history itself.

Fomenting National Unity

In spite of its difficult history in the eyes of press freedom, civil society, and ethnic tensions, the *tatmadaw* was the single most important actor in the establishment of a semblance of national unity, both before and after the 1962 coup. While the language that *Myawaddy* used was vitriolic in its condemnation of the foreign KMT invasion and the possibility of divisive communist uprisings from within, it did much to identify what specifically was the national cause and who specifically the enemy was. Demarcating those who were opposed to Buddhism as the *Dhammarantaya* (or, "Enemy of the Buddha's Teachings"), the *tatmadaw* made use of Buddhism as a mobilizing ideology by singling out communists, who were associated with atheism. Building up the national platform on a cultural adaptation of religious and nationalist zeal, Buddhism would later be syncretized with Ne Win's own interpretations of Marxism, and written into the ideology of the "Burmese Way to Socialism" in 1962. The military, vocalized in the pages of *Myawaddy*, would also express a brewing desire for governance through strongman rule,[31] spelling out the fate of civilian rule and setting a framework of support for the 1962 military coup (one of two *juntas* that Burma would see in the twentieth century alone). Consolidating its control over media outlets during the Cold War and clinching its struggle against press freedom after 1962, the military did much to impose a "civic nationalism" in Burma,[32] a sense of pride and of belonging among those whose sentiment for their homeland

[31] Bo 2010:176.
[32] This phrase in particular is borrowed from Bo 2010:181.

could be channeled into making claims on the past, pledging allegiance to state ideology, expressing hostility towards foreign influence for fear of invasion, and holding steadfast to the twentieth-century principles of nationhood espoused by the same army that continue to mobilize Burmese nationals to this day.

In 1989 the military *junta* led a new campaign to garner popular support amid the hushed grumblings that the coup had brought upon itself the year before. Responding to the mass amounts of civil unrest and student movements that followed Ne Win's devastating demonetarization policy, the *junta* quickly and effectively took power by brutally suppressing any protesters it could find. Many locals reported that the military rounded up students by the dozens, loaded them inside cramped vans, and left them to suffocate in the summer heat.[33] Clearly it was the horror with which Burmese people regarded the military that led the *junta* to redefine itself as a patron of history and culture.

By 1994 the *tatmadaw*-led state had written a four-volume history, established nationwide centers for science, history, and cultural studies, and opened the Defense Services Museum as its crowning achievement in Yangon; Mary Callahan describes it as "unequaled in both its size and the deliberateness with which it places the tatmadaw at the center of all aspects of history."[34] Three years after the museum's debut, the *junta* changed its title officially from the State Law and Order Restoration Council to the State Peace and Development Council, suggesting that law and order no longer needed to be actively restored through force – it sought to maintain internal peace by developing gradually along the patterns of globalization and liberalization. Making its image that of the patron of the arts and sciences rather than the

[33] *Inside Burma: Land of Fear*, dir. David Munro (1996).
[34] Callahan 2003:215.

destroyer of unrest, the *junta* made itself less vulnerable to global demands for regime change by suggesting, through association, that reform had already taken place.

The museum, like its Cold War-era ancestor *Myawaddy*, serves as a veiled mouthpiece for the military to voice its self-perceived supremacy in the history-wide struggle for establishing nationhood in a world marred by tumult and war. We can interpret the military's diversifying efforts at defining its ideology and disseminating it across the country as characteristic of the nature of the external struggle that Burma perceived it was facing at the time. While *Myawaddy* reflected a period in which Burma faced imminent foreign invasion by well-funded military nations, a conflict of ideologies from within, and a plurality of armed ethnic groups making claims on the still-fragile Union of Burma, the Defense Services Museum is one characteristic of a period in which the military must justify its existence as the founder of the nation itself. The museum insinuates that without the military there would be no Myanmar, and therein necessitates its own existence in spite of demand for regime change. Bolstering itself on the legitimacy of its self-narrated past, the military no longer needs the iron fist of the military *junta* to achieve its own ends in society. Rather, it can continue to thrive in the countryside and in urban centers with the ethos of national preservation while the democratically-elected president and partially-elected parliament maintain its prized national status as the creator, the destroyer, and the preserver (within the same institutions that have been "liberalized" since 2011).

Military Presence in Parliament

One of the main obstacles that the contemporary state must overcome in order to give any semblance of democratization is the lack of transparency in elections and in the makeup of the *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw*, or the Assembly of the Union, Myanmar's parliament which is headquartered in Naypyidaw. The *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* is, like the United States, a bicameral

legislature composed of regionally-elected representatives – the Upper House (*Amoytha Hluttaw*) comprising 224 members and the Lower House (*Pyithu Hluttaw*) comprising 440. Unlike the United States, and counter to the narrative of demilitarization that the state has espoused since 2011, 25% of the seats in both the Upper and Lower house are reserved for members of the military, appointed from within. Mirroring similar laws passed by Indonesia that justify military presence in government through direct appointment to political office,[35] the statute was written hastily into the 2008 Constitution and never amended after the abdication of Than Shwe.

While three-fourths of the remaining seats in the *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* are open to the victors of locally-held democratic elections, the nature of political parties in Myanmar is a hot button issue that sparks controversy in the Burmese constituency. This is embodied in the fact that, of 168 open electoral seats in the Upper House and 330 open seats in the Lower House, 129 and 259 (respectively) are held by members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party, a nationalist party comprised principally of the former leaders of the military *junta*. To be sure, all members of President Thein Sein's cabinet are members of the USDP, and Thein Sein unconstitutionally held the position of its Chairman for three years before popular unrest led to his stepping down from the position in 2013.[36] While certainly not all members of the USDP are military strongman politicians, it is disconcerting to the foreign observer to see nearly 85% of both houses of parliament occupied by either the military or a military-backed party. The enduring presence of the *tatmadaw* in the realm of Burmese politics, moreover, has and will compromise the legitimacy of elections in Myanmar – including the political agency of the

[35] *Dwifungsi*, or "dual function" laws were implemented by the Suharto regime following the ouster of democratically-elected President Sukarno in the 1960s. Like Myanmar, the *dwifungsi* law of appointing military élites to parliamentary positions remains in place to this day.

[36] *The Myanmar Times*, "Speaker Confirmed as New USDP Chairman" 6 May 2013. Accessed online 28 April 2015.

National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and that of scores of ethnic minorities that have been disqualified from voting by state-enforced technicalities.

It is difficult to over-emphasize the centrality of the military in the creation of Burmese national imaginings; in the spheres of religion, ethnicity, language, politics, legislation, media, history, and of course, force, the *tatmadaw* has utilized its position of advantage throughout history to actively redefine "Burma" or "Myanmar" in accordance with its own interests and its perception of the interests of the Burmese people (albeit to a lesser extent). In spite of its multiplicity of roles in Burmese military history, from protector to executioner, the instrumental value placed on the military by the Burmese government has blurred the distinction between military and government since well before 1962. We can thus expect future leaders, regardless of military status, to continue to use the *tatmadaw* to serve as the mouthpiece for state interests and ideology by means of direct military action.

The State as an Ethnocentric Governing Body

The transition of Myanmar's capital from Yangon to Naypyidaw was perhaps, among other possible motives, a way of consolidating state power over the nation's ethnic minorities by geographically positioning the capital at the edge of Myanmar's ethnic minority states.[37] In spite of its seemingly-monolithic state and subsequently uniform national ideology, the territory of Burma is marked by a pronounced lack of ethnic homogeneity. It is officially the second most diverse country in mainland Southeast Asia (behind Laos, which officially recognizes over 100 minor ethnic groups),[38] but since decolonization its governance has been controlled almost entirely by Burmans (or Bamars), which account for 68% of Burma's population.[39] In fact, the *tatmadaw* was as responsible for perpetuating Burman control of the territory of Burma as it was for implementing the notion of civic nationalism in the twentieth century. As we've examined above, the Armed Forces have taken on a series of extramilitary functions since decolonization, including but not limited to magazine publishing, law enforcement, and propaganda creation. These activities, combined with the military's primary function of protecting the realm, have taken a grave toll on ethnic minorities, whose geographic location at the periphery of the borders of Myanmar have left them isolated from the array of amenities available in Yangon, Mandalay, and Naypyidaw.

A Long and Difficult History

In order to understand contemporary ethnic tensions in Burma, which are about as disastrous now as they ever have been, we must look at two pivotal moments that took place in the twilight years of the British colonial period: the Kuomintang invasion from China in 1948,

---

[37] Naypyidaw is strategically located between the territories of the Burman, Shan, Karen, Pa-O, and Palaung ethnic groups (among other ethnic sub-groups).
[38] CIA, "Burma," in *World Factbook*, 2005.
[39] Ibid.

and the creation of *Dobama Asiayone* ("Our Burman Association") around the Thakin movement of the 1930s. While the activities of the latter consistently gave an ethnocentric twist to anticolonial rhetoric, the sudden invasion of the KMT gave a rallying point for the Thakins to foment national unity on strictly Burman terms, rejecting both British and Chinese influence from their vision of the future Union of Burma.[40] This movement was known for criticizing not only the agents of colonial occupation (namely, the British and later the Chinese nationalists), but especially those "indigenous" peoples of Burma who cooperated with the colonizers by adopting British styles of clothing or speech and putting down agrarian revolts in the countryside.[41] After Burma had been thoroughly decolonized, the military echoed this nationalist sentiment in its treatment of ethnic minorities that lived closest to Burma's borders. By the 1960s, the *tatmadaw* sought to fight ethnic insurgency with depopulation and economic restriction (as noted earlier, the military wielded considerable influence over the economy even before 1962), and "since it was impossible to determine which Shans, Karens, or Arakanese were rebels and which were peaceful citizens, the easiest solution was to force everyone out of their homes, and in many cases across a flimsy border with a neighboring state such as Thailand or Bangladesh."[42] While Mary Callahan points out that the *tatmadaw* considered all its citizens to be "potential enemies,"[43] history shows that ethnic minorities at the periphery of Burma have repeatedly borne the weight of the military's perceived presence of domestic enemies.

---

[40] The slogan of *Dobama Asiayone* was as follows:

> *Bamā pyi thi - do pyi. Bamā sa thi - do sa. Bamā sa kā thi - do sa kā.*
> *Do pyi khyi' ba. Do sa khyī kyū ba. Do sa kā lei sā ba.*

Translated as:

> "Burma is our country. Burmese literature is our literature. Burmese language is our language.
> "Love our country. Praise our literature. Respect our language."

These ideas, of course, follow Burman ethnic expectations of the ideology of the independent Burmese state. For more, see Mary Callahan 2003:36,233.

[41] Callahan 2003:36.

[42] Callahan 2003:223.

[43] Ibid.

Here we see a bifurcation in the *tatmadaw*'s rhetoric regarding ethnic minorities: the presence of minorities as a threat due to their supposedly inherent predisposition to collaborate with the enemy, and the presence of minorities as a vital component of the diverse fabric of the Burmese nation. Michael Aung-Thwin effectively distinguishes the term "Burman," referring to the majority ethnic group, from the more widely-encompassing term "Burmese," which is a reference to the "language, literature, art, architecture, political ideology, technology, and religious values" as a synthesis of Burman, Pyu, Indian, Mon, and Sinhalese cultural norms.[44] There is certainly no denial even among the most elite Burman political actors that theirs is a nation of rich cultural diversity – but rather than undertaking the (albeit difficult) role of mediator of the nation's host of ethnically-defined disputes, the Burman-controlled government of Myanmar takes on instead the troublesome role of "big brother" to Burma's ethnic minority population. From the brewing mistrust of border populations among *tatmadaw* forces to their skewed representations in state-controlled media,[45] Myanmar fails to produce a unifying synthesis for its own self-construed nation. Defining the nation by underscoring the perilous "other" that lurks beyond Myanmar's borders rather than acknowledging the civil and political rights of its non-Burman population (which comprise one-third of the nation's populace), the government of Myanmar produces ambiguity with respect to its own citizens to the extent that millions have been barred from voting in democratic elections.[46] [47]

[44] Aung-Thwin 1998:29.
[45] See Bo 2010 for visual examples of representations of ethnic minorities across state-controlled media. A primary example of this is a Cold War-era issue of *Myawaddy* in which a Kachin woman is depicted dressed in traditional garb as an example of Burma's rich diversity. The presence of Kachin voices in narrating the trials of their own people was, however, overshadowed by the "official" Burman narration.
[46] 1.3 million Rohingya, a Muslim minority, are officially recognized as "stateless" by the government of Myanmar, and have been restricted suffrage for decades. See http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/12/asia/myanmar-rohingya-voting-rights/. Accessed online 10 May 2015.
[47] Even among officially-recognized ethnic minorities like the Kachin, voting has been postponed indefinitely in previous elections, as in the by-elections of 2012. See http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2263-burma-s-kachin-vote-delay-leaves-two-popular-candidates-out-in-the-cold.html. For disenfranchisement of over 200,000 eligible

One can follow the pattern of historical revisionism vis à vis the *tatmadaw*'s treatment of ethnic minorities as static representations of the nation's treasured diversity. Stressing the importance of the fabled Shan brothers, who are credited with preserving national unity after the collapse of the Pagan Empire, is important in establishing the legitimacy of Burman governance over an ethnically-plural territory.[48] Examples of this include comics dating back to the 1940s and 1950s of the piety of three brothers who traveled to northern India to bring Buddhist teachings and relics to Burma.[49] The ethnicity of these brothers is an otherwise moot point, but the emphasis that is put upon their Shan ethnic identity speaks to the *tatmadaw*'s struggle to create some semblance of pan-ethnic unity despite the ongoing ethnic insurgency that ravages the highlands of northern Myanmar to this day. Moreover, the emphasis on Buddhism as the mediating factor between the Burman majority and its peripheral communities inherently excludes groups like the Rohingya and the Kachin, which do not ascribe to Buddhist practice as a cultural norm.[50] Meanwhile, rather than engaging in equitable peace talks with the Shan or with a host of other ethnicities that currently make claims (either peacefully or coercively) on the Myanmar state, the military continues for the most part to repress their political and economic agency with force while looking backward to officially-narrated histories as a means of maintaining authority in the face of conflict and insurgency. All the while taking pride in its representations of the ethnic plurality, the state chooses to officially recognize eight major ethnic

---

Kachin voters in the Presidential Elections of 2010, see http://www.altsean.org/Research/Parliament%20Watch/By-elections/Quickfacts.php. Accessed online 10 May 2015 and 28 April 2015, respectively.

[48] The Myinsaing Kingdom, which ruled what is now largely Burman ethnic territory (including the ancient city of Pagan), came to be ruled by these three brothers in the 13th century. They are said to be of Shan ancestry, although Michael Aung-Thwin disputes this classification in *Myth and History* (1998).

[49] For the comic itself, see Bo 2010.

[50] Violent conflict with these two groups has underscored the past two years of relations between the *tatmadaw*, the saṅgha, and ethnic minorities. For more on this, see Mary Callahan, *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States*: *Devolution, Occupation, and Coexistence* (2007).

groups,[51] but the manner by which they are represented is entirely on Burman terms, negotiated by military and state conceptions of historical and cultural preservation.

Coercive Agents in Burma's Borderlands

The *tatmadaw* is a presence to be reckoned with throughout Burma, one which lays a particularly heavy hand on the delicate border regions along precariously-drawn political lines. Myanmar's unpredictable relationship with nations like China, Thailand, India, and Bangladesh is tinged with the hue of official xenophobia, an attitude which has complicated the relationship of the state with its ethnic minorities. The "Naypyidaw rationale," meanwhile, has little if any bearing on the daily lives of those who populate Burma's ethnic states; whether it be out of resentment of the *tatmadaw*'s one-sided official histories, fear of military backlash against critical remarks, or mistrust of the army's relationship with other ethnic groups. Bo Bo mentions the indelible impression that the *tatmadaw*'s Cold War military campaigns left on the Shan (labeled as "feudalists") and the Pa-O (labeled as "ethnics") communities;[52] mutually fearing that the *tatmadaw* would collaborate with one and turn against the other, military violence has largely increased suspicion amongst ethnic minorities – that is, towards one other and towards the military.

While political authority in Burma's ethnic minority states continues to lie in the hands of the armed forces, it is worth mentioning that the *tatmadaw* is certainly not the only presence in ethnic minority zones which has the power to coerce. Each of Burma's ethnic states is replete with its own state army and civilian political party, wielding marginal representation in the opposition wing of Myanmar's bicameral legislature. Local elections are held throughout Burma,

[51] Namely: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin (or *Karen*), Chin, Burman (or *Bama, Bamar*), Mon, Rakhine, and Shan. They are divided into 135 sub-groups along linguistic or kin-based distinctions. For more, see the Embassy of Myanmar: http://www.embassyofmyanmar.be/ABOUT/ethnicgroups.htm. Accessed online 28 April 2015.
[52] Bo 2010:180.

as we will discuss later, but for representation in the *Pyithu Hluttaw* only. This developing electoral dynamic, especially since the dissolution of the SPDC in 2011, has indeed led to a series of concessions on part of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar towards its ethnic state subjects. A prominent example of this is the ceasefire agreement that took place in 1989 between the newly-formed military *junta* and the United Wa State Army (UWSA). Mary Callahan notes that this agreement "is believed to have given Wa leaders a free hand in their territory and the right to maintain their army, as well as promises of development assistance from the national state."[53] The trouble with this, however, is in the production of illicit drugs in areas under control of the UWSA – in 2011 alone opium poppy production rose by 17%, boosting Burma to the position of the third largest worldwide producer of opium.[54]

Here we see that decentralization measures introduced by President Thein Sein in Myanmar's new "democratic era" portend potentially disastrous results for the countryside of Burma, increasing the authority and number of coercive agents in areas like the Wa-dominated pockets of the Kachin state. While western political scientists or economists might envision democratization via decentralization of (albeit highly-centralized) political authority as a highly lucrative opportunity for the political development of Myanmar, the opinions of a plurality of Burmese citizens could not be more contrary. "Decentralization in the Burmese context," argues Burmese-American author Michael Aung-Thwin, "means social and political anarchy. *And in Burma, especially, anarchy is feared more than is tyranny*, a value not shared by modern western society, where instead, fear of tyranny is all consuming."[55] Aung-Thwin's commentary here reflects the ongoing disparities between American and European understandings of democracy

---

[53] Mary Callahan, *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation, and Coexistence* from *Policy Studies,* No. 31 (Southeast Asia), (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2007), 28.

[54] CIA 2013.

[55] Michael A. Aung-Thwin, "Parochial Universalism, Democracy *Jihad,* and the Orientalist Image of Burma," in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (2002), 497. Emphasis original.

and Burmese expectations for democracy – complete autonomy is not nearly as valued for the latter as it is for the former. The lack of proper attention given to the unique needs of the Burmese people is reflected in paradoxical American visions for the future of Myanmar: it supports the evolving decentralization of the Myanmar state which has bolstered the position of commanders of ethnic armies in peripheral states, like Wei Xue-kang, a UWSA commander whose history of drug trafficking has led to condemnation and subsequent indictment by the United States government.[56] Decentralization means devolution to insurgent armies and violent actors regardless of institutional affiliation, while mere subsistence for the masses continues to be threatened by scarcity and violence.

The Trouble with Ceasefires

One tendency of the *tatmadaw*, when faced with combat gridlocks in ethnic minority regions, is often to reach a ceasefire with the insurgent group, signaling a precarious peace between the coercive presence of the military and minority-led armies. A ceasefire agreement confirmed by the president is indeed an easy way to divert international criticism and mounting pressures from the domestic sphere, but the efficacy of the ceasefire agreements which have been met in recent years remains questionable. To begin with, the formality of a ceasefire is a crucial component in determining the obligation of the coercive party (here, the *tatmadaw*— and in some cases, additionally local armies or large firms which forcibly extract natural resources[57]) to uphold the terms of this declaration with the signatory parties. Oftentimes, however, there is nothing to sign. Mary Callahan notes the presence of (much delayed) talks between Yangon and insurgent leaders from Myanmar's periphery, culminating in "gentlemen's agreements" to stop

[56] Callahan 2007:28.
[57] Logging in Burma's teak-rich regions is a subject of conflict in Burma to this day. See Callahan 2007:36.

fighting rather than signed confirmations of peace.[58] Even when formal ceasefires are reached, however, much is left to be desired from these haphazard agreements. After more than six decades of civil war, the government of Myanmar reached a ceasefire agreement with the Karen National Union, a sizeable democratic party of Karen ethnic minorities along the Thai border. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, the agreement was breached by the *tatmadaw* two months later, in March 2012,[59] and fighting continues to ravage the countryside of the Karen state to this day.

The Kokang, a Chinese ethnic group residing in the northern Shan state, reached a ceasefire with Yangon in the early 2000s, and although the condition of a number of wealthy investors in the major Kokang city of Laukkai notably improved, the vast majority of Kokang were left at an economic disadvantage.[60] The Kokang, in spite of the ongoing nature of their violent struggle against coercive state forces, have been excluded from the drafting of a formal ceasefire that was convened earlier this year between President Thein Sein and a host of sixteen ethnic minority representatives.[61] Not to mention, as discussed above, freedom from the coercion of the *tatmadaw* does not guarantee freedom from violence or freedom of economic opportunity, basic rights that the state continuously fails to deliver to its host of minorities in Myanmar's border regions. As the Rohingya face a paralyzing threat of deadly sectarian violence in the Rakhine ethnic state, the regime, even after the *junta*'s collapse, continues to look the other way. On 16 August 2012, for example, the Chair of Myanmar's Human Rights Commission (and former Ambassador of the military state) Win Mra insisted that there was no need for

---

[58] Ibid, 35.
[59] Oxford Burma Alliance, "Ethnic Nationalities of Burma." http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/ethnic-groups.html. Accessed online 13 May 2015.
[60] Callahan 2007:26.
[61] *Al Jazeera*, "Myanmar government and rebels agree on ceasefire draft," 1 April 2015. Accessed online 28 April 2015.

investigation by his commission into the alleged violence which was taking place.[62] The stalwart opposition of the Human Rights Commission to addressing Burma's trouble with ethnic violence is characteristic not only of Win Mra's ethnic background as a Rakhine military statesman,[63] but of the vestigial military structures and ideologies that continue to influence Myanmar's governing elite. Since no Burmese government has ever recognized the Rohingya as citizens eligible for civil rights, the contemporary government is slow to change the status-quo of systematic discrimination against this Muslim ethnic minority; as a consequence:

> Rohingya are required to pay high taxes to register births and to request permission for marriage, the latter often subject to lengthy delays. They must also apply for permits to travel anywhere outside their villages. Since most will never obtain permission to travel to the Rakhine State capital, Sittwe, or to the national capital… they have no access to advanced education or medical care.[64]

While the continued persecution of the Rohingya stands out, Myanmar's pervasive and rampant discrimination against its ethnic minorities has contributed to the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), which as of 2014 numbered about 643,000 persons.[65] This figure, combined with Myanmar's population 1.45 million stateless persons,[66] raises a red flag. The violence carried out against IDPs and stateless refugees is characteristic of *de jure* disenfranchisement of ethnic minorities in addition to the large scale *de facto* violence carried out by the *tatmadaw*. For Myanmar to begin to address its ethnic problem, it must look both to the *tatmadaw* and the *hluttaw* (between which exists a significant overlap as it is) for solutions through diversification and demilitarization.

---

[62] ALTSEAN-Burma, Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma. http://www.altsean.org/Research/Regime%20Watch/Judicial/Human%20Rights%20Commission.php. Accessed online 10 May 2015.
[63] Ibid. The vast majority of violence against Rohingya minorities is carried out in and around Sittwe, the capital of the Rakhine state.
[64] Callahan 2007:30.
[65] CIA 2014.
[66] Ibid.

Here we see that the main issues surrounding ceasefires are threefold in Myanmar. First, the government must revise its terms of inclusion on ceasefire drafts and agreements – by sweeping issues like violence against the Rohingya or the Kokang under the rug, Naypyidaw is only exacerbating the tensions that exist between these groups and their distance from the state. Second, the terms by which any agreements are reached must be more specific and geared towards the matters which define each conflict, be it religious, economic, social, ethnic, or linguistic differences. In the act of drafting a ceasefire between sixteen ethnic groups making individual claims on the state, Naypyidaw is essentializing the nature of its conflict rather than approaching each claimant on their own terms. Third, the ceasefire agreements reached between the state and "rebel" groups must be formalized in legally-binding negotiations rather than unreliable "gentlemen's agreements." This requires a heftier role of the Human Rights Commission in the drafting of the nationwide ceasefire; it must more actively engage the state and examine the specificities which are being treated rather than "laud[ing] and honour[ing] the historic achievement that was accomplished by signing the agreed text on a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement"[67]

Future Prospects

Whether ideologically or politically, Myanmar's potential to break the mold of ethnically charged violence is unlikely to take place through the democratic process. The National League for Democracy (NLD), the main opposition party led by Aung San Suu Kyi, has already announced it will challenge the results of the upcoming 2015 election, and freedom of expression

[67] "Statement No. (4/2015) of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission relating to agreement by the two sides on the draft text on nationwide ceasefire." http://www.altsean.org/Research/Regime%20Watch/Judicial/HRCStatements/2015/HRC-%20020415.php. Accessed online 11 May 2015.

is still restricted both by law and by custom.[68] While the NLD's anticipation of an unfair electoral process signals that Myanmar's elections lack sufficient transparency, the majority candidate for presidency in 2015 is a troublesome figure for ethnic minorities across Burma. Shwe Mann, who received the military honorific title of *Thura* ("brave hero") after he led a *tatmadaw* campaign to capture the headquarters of the Karen National Union in 1989, was Generalissimo Than Shwe's hand-picked successor and third-in-command during Myanmar's *junta* rule.[69] As he rose through the ranks of the *junta* and now the post-*junta* government, he currently holds the position of Speaker of the House and is the presidential candidate for the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP, the majority in both houses, comprising mostly of *junta* and military elites) in 2015. While his involvement with the Htoo Construction Company and various export businesses may implicate him for their alleged practices of slave labor in ethnic minority regions,[70] [71] he is believed to have "utilized forced civilian porters, including women and children, on a massive scale during operations against Karen insurgents."[72]

Whether or not the figure of Shwe Mann himself is reprehensible for the atrocities that continue to ravage the Karen state, his reputed position as "Number 3" in the late military regime ("Number 1," Than Shwe, resigned as Chairman and Commander-in-Chief in 2011; "Number 2," Maung Aye, is 77 years of age and has allegedly been in "poor health for years"[73]) carries the burden of human rights atrocities across Myanmar's seven ethnic minority states. The offensive he led against the Karen National Union dozens of years ago echoes into present-day civil

---

[68] CIA 2014.
[69] American Embassy at Rangoon, "Biography: Shwe Mann, Burma' s Dictator-in-Waiting." 16 March 2007. Scheduled for declassification 15 March 2017, released by WikiLeaks 13 April 2012. https://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/03/07RANGOON283.html. Accessed online 13 May 2015.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Munro 1996.
[72] American Embassy at Rangoon 2007.
[73] ALTSEAN-Burma, "Maung Aye." 2012. http://www.altsean.org/Research/SPDC%20Whos%20Who/SPDC/MaungAye.htm. Accessed online 13 May 2015.

warfare in the Karen state, with the KNU being the “largest and most significant ethnic nationalist group still at war.”[74] The violence that reverberates from decades of military rule has by no means faded in the Burmese countryside, and Shwe Mann’s likelihood of being voted as the president of “democratic” Myanmar signals a slim possibility for state-sponsored violence and corporate devastation of resource-rich ethnic states to end as we know it.

If the implications of this information truly link Shwe Mann to corporate fraud and large-scale ethnic violence, his regime will likely face the scrutiny of people within and outside of Myanmar’s borders. Moreover, the questionable legitimacy of modern-day elections reflects the USDP’s potential to bypass electoral roadblocks and facilitate Shwe Mann’s rise to the position of the presidency. While the evolving democratic latitude of the polity of Myanmar signals the potential for electoral change in November of 2015, the patterns of Burma’s nascent democracy show us that this transition is unlikely to take place without a struggle. Whether this struggle will take the form of nonviolent street demonstrations met with violent state repression (as seen in 2007), or whether this will take place in the arena of elections, will need to stand the test of time. Meanwhile, with escalating ethnic violence, a continuing presence of military governing actors, and a steadfast opposition to acknowledge Rohingya citizenship from Naypyidaw, it is difficult to imagine that reform will take place at the moral behest of the state.

[74] Callahan 2007:34.

The State as the Sole Interpreter of Democracy

Perhaps no country's struggle for "democracy" has been more poorly understood worldwide than that of Myanmar, whose governing body has endured the scrutiny of millions, from criticism over its ongoing disenfranchisement of the Rohingya ethnic minority to the lack of transparency in Myanmar's electoral process. Since "opening up" in 2011, the nation of Myanmar remains by and large a closed book; half of the country remains inaccessible to locals and tourists without prior permission, with only slight alterations in accessibility to the Mon and Rakhine states since the days of the military regime.[75] The country remains governed by the 2008 Constitution, which among other things reinforces the denial of suffrage to certain ethnic minorities and people of the cloth, while maintaining that the President (a new figure to Burmese political culture) is "not 'answerable' to any court or the *Hluttaw* 'for exercise of the powers and functions of his office' or acts associated thereof, except impeachment."[76] Although the powers of the presidency, the legislative functions, and creation of political parties are all spelled out in the lengthy constitution, a generous milieu of powers are granted to the state in its ability to interpret the terms of Myanmar's newfound "democracy," from arbitrating voting rights to protecting the nation's steadfast religious and ethnic majority with the enduring presence of the military. We must, in light of the state's rigid position in Burma, view the stipulations of the 2008 Constitution as reflective of the specific concerns of the new political regime, and its executors as career politicians accustomed to the habitus of non-civilian rule. From the Saffron Revolution, which seemed to the world to spell out the regime's death sentence, to the present,

[75] Tourism Transparency, 24 April 2013. For the full map, see http://www.tourismtransparency.org/no-go-zones-changes. Accessed online 16 May 2015.
[76] Chapter V, Article 215 of the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Quoted in Steinberg 2010:146.

the evolving Burmese government has adapted to the changing character of its internal demography by reinforcing its control over the civic and political lives of its constituents.

The so-called Saffron Revolution of 2007 originated in the spring of that year, during which veterans of the bloody 1988 uprising came together with the All Burma Monks Association and the monastic Sāsana Moli organization to "boycott the regime's referendum on a proposed constitution that assured the continuing role of the military in national politics."[77] That summer, crowds of civilian protesters joined the growing network of young monks on the streets of Yangon, culminating in months of (mostly) nonviolent resistance against the growing cost of living and poor quality of political freedom that Burma had seen under the rule of the SPDC. In spite of the occasional skirmish between ardent young protestors and trigger-happy young soldiers, the movement, especially accentuated by the presence of robed Buddhist monks, is best characterized by signs reading "non-violence: national movement,"[78] which were paraded through the streets of Yangon before human chains of monks and laypeople.

While some political scientists underscore the actual significance of the presence of monks in the protests of 2007, it is nonetheless worth noting that the so-called Saffron Revolution (named for the traditionally saffron-colored robes of the Buddhist saṅgha) brought with it very little state violence as compared to its destructive counterpart in 1988. The state of Myanmar gives 13 as the official number of casualties in the violence brought on by the 2007 "revolution" (albeit a frugal number) while at least 3,000 are known to have died in the uprisings that took place before Than Shwe consolidated power in the late 1980s.[79] The presence of

---

[77] Schober 2011:121. Despite the efforts of the joint monastic and lay commitment to demilitarize the future of Myanmar, the military constitution would come to pass a year later.
[78] For the image, see: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2007_Myanmar_protests_7.jpg. Accessed online 17 May 2015.
[79] Mark Tallentire. "The Burma Road to Ruin," from *The Guardian,* 28 September 2007. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/28/burma.uk. Accessed online 18 May 2015.

monks, although denounced by the military as "bogus" monastics "incited by [American] imperialists,"[80] must have played a factor in the hesitance of certain military officials in enacting large-scale violence against the protestors. Whether the monks were seen as a threat or as an innocuous party to the masses of protesters, the presence of the saṅgha gave not only name but cohesion and unity to this pivotal movement in Burma's political history.

State and Saṅgha after the Saffron Revolution

While beatings and arrests of monks and laypeople were indeed rampant in the protests of 2007, most political prisoners were released – the regime became focused on making an example of a select few of the participants of the so-called "revolution" to discourage further protests from taking place. Perhaps the most notable of these figures is that of U Gambira, who became somewhat of a monastic poster child for the leadership of the Saffron Revolution. While 120 prisoners were released soon after their arrests in 2007, Gambira was sentenced to sixty-eight years in prison – an incarceration system denounced by human rights groups like Amnesty International.[81] Myanmar's denunciation of monks like Gambira was made manifest in the provisions of the 2008 Constitution with respect to suffrage for monks and nuns. Some scholars attest that the presence of monks in the Saffron Revolution, which was not *per se* a "revolution" as much as it was a series of demonstrations, did succeed in expediting the lengthy process of framing the 2008 Constitution, which had apparently been in the works since 1993.[82] [83] While Gambira was a living reminder for monks to avoid disrupting Burma's political status quo in

---

[80] Steinberg 2010:139.
[81] Amnesty International, 3 June 2011. "Myanmar prisoners kept in 'dog-cells' after protests." http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/myanmar-prisoners-kept-in-%E2%80%98dog-cells-after-protests. Accessed online 17 May 2015.
While the title of this piece speaks for itself, it is worth noting that the presence of political prisoners in Myanmar is a consistent aspect of the new "democratic" state.
[82] Steinberg 2010:142.
[83] Taken from a phone conversation with David Steinberg, held on 30 January 2015.

light of the military's patronage of Buddhist works, the constitution served to reinforce on a *de jure* basis the extent to which monks could and could not participate politically.

Tomas Larsson discusses the constitution's continued restriction of suffrage for monks and nuns within the cultural framework of an existing social contract – one in which monks agreed to play an apolitical role in society in exchange for the political patronage of the Burmese state: "The state had a contract that [the Buddhist monk] should not [be engaged in politics]… the state had a duty to prevent his *trespassing* into the electoral and legislative arena. In most instances, the monks themselves – or at least the senior echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy – have agreed."[84] Here, Larsson's defense of the political disenfranchisement of Buddhist monks is based on his interpretation of their lack of voting rights as a formalization of an implicit code of ethics and conduct in Burma's religious landscape, not as a response to a perception of the saṅgha as a threat in the aftermath of 2007. I would, however, challenge Larsson's generalization of the apparent social contract between the Burmese saṅgha and state, two bodies which have participated in a significant give-and-take relationship over the past millennia. Whether or not the state saw monks marching in Yangon as "bogus" or otherwise, the swiftness with which Gambira was sentenced and the relative leniency which the *tatmadaw* exercised in quelling the 2007 demonstrations reflects more than just a social contract. Burmese political actors, in framing the 2008 Constitution, likely feared to some extent the possibility of the removal of its religious base of legitimacy, which has served to reinforce their historic and contemporary roles as "righteous protector-kings in their own right."[85] By simultaneously ensuring the right of *recognized* nikāya within the Burmese saṅgha to operate while barring all its members from participating politically, the Burmese state upheld its perceived role as "protector" of the

[84] Tomas Larsson, "Monkish Politics in Southeast Asia," in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014). Emphasis added.
[85] Larsson 2014:45.

religious order while preventing the opinions of younger, more radical monks (such as those who marched on the streets of Yangon in 2007) from entering the democratic arena of politics. Moreover, by legally preventing the ordination of those who participated in the Saffron Revolution, the state consolidates its control over religious affairs while minimizing the likelihood of more "charismatic" monks from entering the saṅgha. Although the barring of monks' and nuns' right to vote was an extension of existing laws, we must understand the relevance of its continuation as reflective of evolving tensions that exist between Burma's religious society and its supposedly secular state.

A Democratic Constitution with a Military Face

As discussed above, the origins of the Saffron Revolution lie in a popular discontent with constitutional provisions that would allow for further military presence in Burmese political leadership. Indeed, despite the *tatmadaw*'s attempts to further an image of itself as a patron of the saṅgha and a protector of the nation, its coercive presence in urban centers and the ethnic periphery of Burma remains a troubling prospect for the nation's supposedly "democratic" future. The 2008 Constitution's specification of an enduring role for the military is seen by scholars like David Steinberg as the most important aspect of the document's more than two hundred pages: "The military published the 104 principles on which the constitution was to be written. Most important was the planned primary role of the military under *any* new government (reflected in the constitution in Chapter I,6 (f)): 'enabling the Defense services to be able to participate in the National political leadership of the State.'"[86] This ambiguous role has been used to justify the military's continued presence in the State of Myanmar, which occupies political office in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

---

[86] Steinberg 2010:142-3. Emphasis added.

This martial focus on state-building is expressed not only in constitutional provisions specifying the military make-up of governing bodies (like the reservation of 25% of legislative seats for appointed members of the *tatmadaw*), but even in the make-up of political organizations that most nations would place under civilian leadership. In particular, the constitution spells out the terms for the establishment and functioning of the Union Elections Commission, which is designed to supervise *Hluttaw* elections, designate electoral constituencies, mediate voting and electoral disputes, and determine when to withhold or postpone elections depending on local situations.[87] While these duties certainly don't stand out as far as constitutionally-appointed commissions go, it is clear that the Union Elections Commission of Myanmar (whose members are either enlisted or ex-military) has taken liberties with the extent of its jurisdiction. The commission today comprises seven individuals, chaired by Tin Aye. Blacklisted by the European Union for having procured "military hardware" from North Korea, Tin Aye has a finger in every pie in Myanmar politics: from his leadership of the *tatmadaw*'s Southern Command and the Military Ordnance during the years of Than Shwe to his history as chairman of the regime's economic conglomerate UMEH (Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings).[88] While Tin Aye's chairmanship of the Elections Commission might represent a conflict of interest in any other case (after all, he has vested interests in *tatmadaw* leadership and in state economic monopolies, both of which are advocated by the USDP majority party), the constitution affirms that the Chairman of the Union Elections Commission can only be removed in the event he committed treason, violated the constitution itself, engaged in formal misconduct, or failed to perform the necessary

[87] *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar* (2008). Chapter IX, 399.
For the full text in English, see http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf. Accessed online 18 May 2015.

[88] ALTSEAN Burma, "Election Commission" (2012).
http://www.altsean.org/Research/Regime%20Watch/Judicial/Election%20Commission.php. Accessed online 16 May 2015.

duties of his office.[89] Moreover, Aye's appointment as a result of his previous military leadership (the president need only be assured of the chairman's "eminence" as a person[90]) has precluded him from being held responsible for his alleged misconduct – the President, as discussed before, and his actions in office are not to be held responsible before the scrutiny of any court or legislative body.

Chapter IX of the constitution is devoted entirely to elections in Myanmar, and is prefaced by the imperative that the only direct elections that can take place should be for local *Hluttaw* representatives. This voting contingency is accompanied with an array of potentially disqualifying factors including, but not limited to, "persons serving prison terms" (thereby excluding political prisoners from voting), "persons who not yet been declared free of insolvent" (excluding those who have amassed debt, presumably huge in the economically-disadvantaged countryside), and "persons determined to be of an unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent Court."[91] Here we see a severely limiting role for the eligible populace in the process of voting, which can even be withheld entirely if the region is undergoing what the constitution loosely refers to as a "local security situation."[92] While these "security situations" can range from sporadic insurgency to civil war in Burma's ethnic states, it is worth noting that while the military boasts a 98.12% voter turnout among its eligible voters,[93] (even if this is true) this figure represents only a small fraction of Myanmar's actual population due to the severe restrictions that the state maintains for voter eligibility.

Here we begin to see the porous structures of democratic reform in Myanmar, characterized better by the leeway with which military actors are treated in the constitution and

[89] *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*. Chapter IX, 400 (a).
[90] Ibid. Chapter IX, 398 (b).
[91] Ibid. Chapter IX, 392 (b-d).
[92] Ibid. Chapter IX, 399 (e).
[93] Steinberg 2010:144.

the immense power that is granted to the executive. Whether lending favor to military actors in government institutions or implementing direct orders from the top down, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar remains part and parcel governed by the norms of its former regime. Democratization, on the other hand, appears to be no more than a red herring to the government (and even to the people!). While the government has interpreted "democracy" as being characterized by the presence of a modern constitution, an apparent division of powers, and a series of decentralizing measures in its governing practice, organizations like the National League for Democracy sought out its presence only by means of a weaker role of the military and more legitimate national elections. As a response to these stimuli, the government has deployed its military to violently quell its internal cries for reform while using the constitution to bar candidates like Aung San Suu Kyi from holding office.[94] Suu Kyi is left to her only resort of bargaining for the needs of her constituents with military actors already in line to ascend to the presidency (an office indirectly elected by members of the *Pyithu Hluttaw*). The upper hand that the state wields as a result of this structure of power carries less-than-hopeful prospects for a less exclusionary mode of electoral politics in Myanmar.

Trajectories for Democracy in Burma/Myanmar

While a variety of western nations may emphasize the need for developing nations like Myanmar to "democratize," the idea of democracy itself (whatever that may entail to the individual) holds little to no relevance in the hearts and minds of the fifty-five million inhabitants of Burma, who are more likely to seek stability in their everyday lives rather than to put pressure

---

[94] *Democratic Voice of Burma*. "Suu Kyi does not rule out alliance with Shwe Mann." 8 May 2015. Accessed online 17 May 2015. Note: *Democratic Voice of Burma*, once the mouthpiece of the opposition to the military *junta*, has since been outlawed in Myanmar and moved its headquarters to Scandinavia.
Aung San Suu Kyi is thought to have been the reason for a hastily-added constitutional provision that prevents those with foreign-born children from holding presidential office.

on the government to implement democratic reforms. Michael Aung-Thwin best explains this complex paradigm in his work on what he calls "democracy *jihad*:"

> Patron-clientelism is still dominant at all levels and categories of society; authority and power are still intrinsic and not extrinsic (that is, ascribed rather than prescribed); loyalty is still given more to the person rather than the idea; persona, genealogy, and the manifestation of *karma* are still important ingredients in political legitimacy; and the place and well-being of Buddhism in society is still a yardstick for determining moral order and, hence, socio-political legitimacy. Democracy, in other words, is not even an issue for most of the people of Burma most of the time.[95]

The attitudes of the Burmese populace can therefore be understood (but not essentialized) as a conglomerate of concerns which relate to maintaining socially and culturally established networks of obtaining goods and services rather than a direct political concern that might otherwise pervade the mindset of a concerned western observer. It is certainly not my intent to condemn the military and the government of Myanmar for its "revolving door politics," nor to denounce the entirety of Burma as apolitical or disinterested. Rather, my attention is fixed on the competing claims for what the west essentializes as "democracy:" something that is in reality an imagined conglomerate that consists of a concatenation of affects and anxieties, from Northern hill tribe peasants to military elites, for the legitimacy of its governing body and its social institutions. Practically everyone in Burma is aware of the military and of the contemporary problems of the state – but we cannot expect the Burmese populace to engage its political leaders exactly as we do in the banal western arena of "democratic politics."

What, then, can we expect for the future of Myanmar/Burma as we know it? With the dubious nature of elections themselves in Burma, nationwide elections are still scheduled to take place in November of 2015. President Thein Sein has suggested that "democracy" (or, at least, his understanding thereof) can only prevail if Myanmar reaches a ceasefire agreement with all

[95] Aung-Thwin 2002:501.

ethnic rebel groups.[96] While this process is still in the works within the guarded walls of Naypyidaw, the Kokang and various others excluded from the ceasefire drafted months ago stand to benefit very little from this "democratic" stride. Meanwhile Tin Aye, the infamous Chair of the Elections Commission, has announced he will resign from his post after "free and fair" elections are held in Myanmar,[97] and President Thein Sein himself is expected to be stepping down from his post to make way for a new contender. Change is almost certain to come to Myanmar's political arena come November, but of what hue will this change manifest? Aung San Suu Kyi is still constitutionally banned from ascending to the presidency, a provision which can only be overturned by a 75% vote of the legislature[98] – this requires not only the majority of the civilian legislative vote, but the approval of a sizeable portion of the military appointed to the *Hluttaw* as well. Given the complicated relationship between Suu Kyi and the nation's military, this amendment is unlikely to be overturned on her behalf before the end of the year.

Myanmar's position in the international community is nonetheless a candid reflection of the nation's internal issues of ethnic discontent and political strife. Only a few weeks ago, Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh and Burma went afloat from the Bay of Bengal in search of a country that would accept them, signaling their willingness to risk death in pursuit of a sense of safety and well-being – something which the Rohingya are continually denied by Myanmar state policy and by incidental bouts of violent insurgency. The significant amount of international attention that has emerged from this humanitarian crisis, however, has prompted the Myanmar government to agree to attend a regional summit on the issue in Bangkok despite its earlier insistence that it would not engage in diplomatic talks under the controversial pretext of

---

[96] *The Irrawaddy*, "Burma General Elections Scheduled in Late 2015: Election Official." 21 October 2014. http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burma-general-elections-scheduled-late-2015-election-official.html. Accessed online 20 May 2015.
[97] Ibid.
[98] *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*. Chapter XII, 436(b).

Rohingya persecution.[99] Small steps such as this demonstrate the possibility for the Republic of Myanmar to respond to the needs of its ethnic minorities and internally displaced persons when facing a seemingly-insurmountable amount of pressure from other Southeast Asian nations and the foreign press. Perhaps unaccustomed to criticism from its own press, the international media has also succeeded in refusing to let issues like the Rohingya humanitarian crisis to slip beneath the woodwork, at least for now. Facing pressure from an assortment of governmental and non-governmental bodies, Burma has the possibility of developing its complex political culture to the point of challenging the government on the people's own terms. We must not forget that the rafts full of refugees are still scattered across the Pacific and Indian oceans, and that the Rohingya constitute only a fraction of the masses of disenfranchised individuals and groups across the Burmese political landscape. If Burma is to implement democracy, be it from above or below, pressure must be placed on the government from within and outside – not on the terms of international actors but of the Burmese populace which struggles to maintain a voice amid the clatter of insurgency and repression. Democracy, in other words, can only come to Burma if the people will it to happen. If we allow political or military actors to implement their lofty idea of "democracy" in the Myanmar government, we can expect little change from actually taking place.

[99] *Al Jazeera*, "Malaysia sends four ships to look for stranded migrants." 22 May 2015. Accessed online 22 May 2015.

Conclusion

"All nations live by myths. Any nation is the sum of the consciousness of its people: the chaotic infinitude of the experience and perceptions of millions alive and dead. Merely in order to communicate with itself, to function as a conscious organism at all, a nation must distill and simplify this chaos into the ideas and slogans of public debate and politics. One of the essential agents in this crystallization of the national consciousness is myth."

-Godfrey Hodgson[100]

The presence of the "origin myth" in Burma is perhaps its most distinguished enduring quality. The origin myth revives the lost functions of Burmese kingship and patronage from the murky depths of Southeast Asian history, mobilizing the masses towards an uncertain future with an even more uncertain government. In Burma, where Buddhism is used to validate political and military leadership (oftentimes one in the same), the dynastic eras of the past become blurred in a nationalist milieu. Defense becomes an ethical principle of the nation, a duty of the contemporary government to eradicate the threats of foreign invasion or ideological incursion which are constantly envisioned by the concerned political elite. Looking backward is not simply a means of distracting the masses from contemporary problems: it is a reframing of the nation's emerging civil and political issues within the legitimizing rhetoric of kings past. As if to ask itself, "What would Anawrahta do," the political leadership of Myanmar emulates figures of the past by using the logic of defense and kingly patronage in its official language. Using the deixis of "our" language and "our" customs,[101] the postcolonial state intends to unify the masses around a somewhat contrived national identity, negotiated on Burman terms just as the three great kings of Burma's past sought out to do. In doing so, Burmese elites rewrite history by retroactively treating empires as nations, and kings as their civic leaders. Whether restoring pagodas or procuring relics, the Myanmar government does much to preserve its past as a reminder of its

[100] Taken from Hodgson's book *America in Our Time* (1976), pages 3-4.

[101] This term is used famously by political scientist and social psychologist Michael Billig in his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995). "Deixis" refers to a unifying language (ie. "*My fellow* Americans," or "*We* the People") that nations may utilize to establish and reinforce ideas of nationhood across a sprawling geographic landscape.

relevance to the modern-day nation, excluding from its ideological framework those who don't religiously or ethnically ascribe to its historic national vision.

Arbitrating the terms by which history could be interpreted, the military took on an evolving role that continues to define the Burmese state as a military democracy. While serving as the mouthpiece for the state in its pursuit of an official history, the *tatmadaw* took to the countryside to enforce the "nation" and its tenets upon the agrarian populace, but in the process failed to implement the sense of civic nationalism or unifying identity that the nation perhaps initially sought to enact. While its rhetoric established the government as protecting the rich cultural diversity of its peoples throughout history, the military's consolidation of political authority in the turbulent 20th century set a troublesome precedent. Mary Callahan describes this transformation in her description of military state-building that followed decolonization: "In a sense, the military solution to internal crises crowded out other potential state reformers, turning officers into state builders and military-as-state itself. In this solution, citizens became *barriers* to the army's consolidation of political power and national sovereignty."[102] Here we see the root of the logic of mass political participation as an "intrusion" into the affairs of the monolithic state rather than a contribution to the democratic developments of an evolving polity. Demonstrating the array of claims for "democracy" that the Burmese populace continues to lay out, the limited political rights of eligible voters in Myanmar show that political change will ostensibly come from above.

I initially sought to write this paper on the role of monks in the Saffron Revolution – I thought there was some way that I could link the deeply-religious worldview of ordinary Burmese people, from remote villagers to top military actors, with the restrained violence that took place in 2007. As I continued my research, however, I found that much more was to be

[102] Callahan 2003:206. Emphasis added.

discovered in this complex nation of fifty-five million. I read accounts of political prisoners and monks who were beaten in the streets, ancient chronicles of kings and relics scrawled on tablets enshrined in centuries-old stūpas, and modern-day critiques of political leadership in the Republic of Myanmar. What I came to find was that it would not do anything to simply look at this one aspect of a single social movement in Burma's political history. Try as I might, I simply couldn't explain the struggles of protestors or the violence of the military, or better, the human element of the socio-political landscape of Myanmar, without looking into the multiplex of state-legitimizing rhetoric. In Myanmar it is the political which is personal, and not the other way around. In this paper I have attempted to provide some synthesis of history, politics, religion, sociology, and anthropology in the complex make-up of what is still referred to as Myanmar: a nation in which the honorific title of *bogyoke*, or "military general" can be transformed into the political moniker of *u*, or "venerable one" at the tip of a hat. In the same decade that a man named Ne Win (translated as "brilliant as the sun"[103]) demonetarized two-thirds of the national currency because of his affinity for the number nine,[104] a *sui coup* (a coup d'état in which the army replaces a government run by the army) called for a complete overhaul of all state institutions along military lines. The Burmese are certainly not unaccustomed to political change, and if anything, the drastic political upheaval that took place from 1960 to 2011 taught a valuable lesson to the Burmese government and civilian population: military rule is not a guarantor of national stability. Nowadays, the government is dealing with a new lesson—that the concept of democracy, likewise, is also not a guarantor of that very stability it sought out. If Myanmar is to implement positive change in its governing structures, it must encourage a stronger sense of civic participation among its diverse population.

[103] "U Ne Win." *Bio*. A&E Television Networks, 2015. Web. 22 May 2015.
[104] Steinberg 2006:90.

In 1962, the Burmese Way to Socialism was established as a national ideology, giving rise to an "admixture of certain elements of Buddhist cosmology and philosophical concepts with Marxist terms."[105] A model for the kind of political change one might perceive as drastic or sudden, one finds that this level of regime turnover is not so surprising considering the effect that Buddhist cosmology played in pushing out colonial influence from Burma. After all, it is traditionally thought that anticolonial uprisings began against the British when their colonial officers refused to remove their shoes at the 2,500-year-old Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.[106] The text of "The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment," a product of the Burmese Way to Socialism, reads as follows: "the growth of the spiritual life of the human society thus cultivated and nourished by man, in turn, influences the growth of the material life of that society (the production of food, clothing, shelter, and social and cultural needs of life)."[107] I find this passage remarkable for its apt description of political and spiritual life in Burma; it follows the logic that one's own personal cultivation produces one's ability to subsist and thrive. While borrowing from socialist doctrine and Buddhist principles of mental purification, I see this brief snippet of ideology as part of an enduring political culture in Myanmar/Burma. One provides for oneself and in doing so, produces the necessities of social and cultural life, perhaps for one's entire community. Therefore the state's patronage of religion, military, ethnicity, and even democracy is not simply a mode of standardizing ideology or enforcing authoritarian rule over a nation as vast as Myanmar. State ideology, following this logic (which was officially abandoned in 1988), continues to use its patronage of religious and even military institutions to foment the "spiritual growth" of the entire nation. Perhaps if the entire nation could participate in the terms

---

[105] James F. Guyot, "Burma in 1988 - *Perestroika* with a Military Face," in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989), 11.
[106] Aye Kyaw, *The Voice of Young Burma*, (SEAP Publications, 1993).
[107] "The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment," published 17 January 1963 by the Burma Socialist Programme Party. English text available at http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/System-of-correlation.htm.

by which human society is cultivated, rather than the military mandate of a few autocrats, the evolving needs of this intricate but fascinating country could finally be met.

Postscript: The 2015 "Boat Crisis"

In recent weeks, the plight of the Rohingya ethnic group has made headlines across the globe as at least 120,000 refugees[108] from Bangladesh and Myanmar have fled persecution and economic instability in their home countries. After being pushed away by a milieu of naval fleets, these refugees, mostly (though not entirely) Rohingya, have been slowly ricocheting back and forth between mainland and island Southeast Asia with little food and fresh water. What can be taken away from this humanitarian crisis, now that Myanmar has joined the ranks of ASEAN nations, despite months of stubborn resistance, to discuss the causes and conditions of the Rohingya exodus? While it is certainly not my intention to impugn the profound suffering that the Rohingya have endured within and outside of Myanmar's borders, I find the manner by which the issue is discussed in mass media to be misinformed as to the delicate structure of the current Burmese state, and naïve of the equal weight that this conflict bears on the governments of Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Moreover, this issue should be put into conversation with the issues that we have discussed above – *how* and *when* reform comes about in the legal realm of Burmese politics has a great deal to do with the amount of external pressure that is placed on its institutions and cultural assumptions.

First and foremost, it is my intention to express my concern for what I perceive as a misunderstanding in the media's treatment of the Rohingya crisis – namely, its exclusive treatment as a religious conflict rather than an ethnic one. As we've discussed, Burma's populace

---

[108] *Al Jazeera*, "Myanmar navy to check migrants' IDs in 'safe' location." 2 June 2015. http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/6/2/myanmar-navy-to-check-migrants-ids-in-safe-location.html. Accessed online 2 June 2015.

is 89% Buddhist, and as media outlets like Al Jazeera and CNN are keen to point out, the persecution against Rohingya Muslims is most rampant within the borders of Myanmar's Buddhist Rakhine state. Reporter Joseph Schatz claims that Myanmar's "4-year-old experiment with a more democratic system" began by "attacking the Rohingya – *and, by extension, the broader Muslim population*, which has long been integrated into Myanmar society."[109] While Schatz is right to acknowledge the long history in which Burmese Muslims have resided in what is now Myanmar, he fails to mention any Muslim groups in Myanmar, other than the Rohingya, that have been attacked. Indeed, violence has been documented by Human Rights Watch since June of 2012 against the Rohingya and the Kamein, another Muslim ethnic group in the Rakhine state.[110] However, the Kamein (also called "Kaman") are a legally-recognized ethnic group in Myanmar, a subsect of the Rakhine (also called "Arakan") that are indigenous to Burma.[111] Meanwhile, the Panthay, a Chinese Muslim ethnic minority living in Myanmar's heartland, worship freely even in large cities like Mandalay. The violence carried out in Rakhine state is clearly an ethnic, not only a religious issue. Regardless of the religious or ethnic bias that the Rakhine ethnic group may harbor in committing the violence carried out against Rohingya and Kamein Muslims, it would be naïve to view Naypyidaw as Islamophobic for its denial of citizenship rights to the Rohingya when it gives full legal status to other Muslim ethnic groups. While this certainly does not excuse the abject squalor in which Rohingya Muslims are forced to live due to ethnic violence and political disenfranchisement, we must view their problem as one which is multidimensional – not simply an issue of Buddhist versus Muslim.

---

[109] Joseph Schatz, "In Myanmar, attacking the Rohingya is good politics." *Al Jazeera,* 29 May 2015. http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/5/29/in-myanmar-attacking-the-rohingya-is-good-politics.html. Accessed online 2 June 2015. Emphasis added.

[110] "Burma: Rohingya Muslims Face Humanitarian Crisis." *Human Rights Watch*, 26 March 2013. http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/26/burma-rohingya-muslims-face-humanitarian-crisis. Accessed online 2 June 2015.

[111] Than Tun Win 2013.

Right: An image of the Panthay Mosque at Mandalay, a place of worship for the ethnic Panthay Chinese Muslims in Myanmar's second-largest city. As the sign indicates, it has stood since 1868. *Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

The conditions which have led to what many brand as the "boat crisis" are up for debate. While humanitarian groups insist that it is the poor living conditions, mandated by the Myanmar state, that have given way to the diaspora from Burma and Bangladesh, the government of Myanmar insists that it is the presence of "corrupt traffickers in the region who have lured them onto boats with promises of jobs abroad."[112] To be sure, as I have mentioned above in the section on Burma's ethnic states, the government is certainly not the only coercive agency in Myanmar's border lands. The territory of Burma is replete with armed groups ready to further their own agenda independent of the will of the state, from Ashin Wirathu's xenophobic (but *not* state-sanctioned) 969 Movement to exterminate the Rohingya, to human traffickers positioned along Myanmar's flimsy borders. Nonetheless, media reporters continue to single out the monolithic

[112] Schatz 2015.

government of Myanmar as reprehensible for the attacks and hasty exodus of the Rohingya, along with Bangladeshi non-Burmese groups, into the Bay of Bengal.

The overall effect of these media attacks, in short, is that of discontent and nationalist defense in Myanmar's large cities. In Yangon especially, hundreds have crowded the streets insisting that Myanmar is not to blame for the crisis and that it has been "bullied" by the United Nations.[113] Producing backlash from a small but noticeable portion of the population, the Rohingya "boat crisis" has led to the scapegoating of Thein Sein's government for upholding antiquated laws that bar the Rohingya from citizenship. While these laws are damaging to Myanmar's reputation, as a recent member of ASEAN and as a developing nation, it is worth noting that this pressure has largely led only to resentment among the citizenry of Myanmar. While it has also persuaded Naypyidaw to participate in a series of talks that would have been unthinkable only one month ago, the rhetoric with which international journalists brand the government and people of Burma is one-sided and polarizing.

This perceived "bullying," in other words, produces a reaction among state structures and chunks of the population which is counterproductive. Falling back on the unifying nationalist language of protectionism, jingoism, and the potential for foreign attack, state and non-state actors instill paranoia among protesters and bystanders across the country by insisting that the Rohingya are a threat to the nation's stability. Media reports, accentuating this perceived threat by honing in on the faults of the Myanmar government, thus entrench xenophobia even in Myanmar's large cities rather than improving conditions for the Rohingya. Although the one-sided attention that the media has thus far given the "boat crisis" has led the government of Myanmar to participate in international talks in Bangkok, something which would have been unthinkable even a month ago, the outward criticism that the state has been the target of will

[113] Ibid.

likely prevent candid discussion from taking place. Lip service, rather than genuine international involvement, will characterize the government's participation in talks about the Rohingya if it continues to feel attacked by the foreign press.

A possible solution to this ethical and political quandary would be for journalists to broaden their scope to focus on the widespread and ingrained issues of ethnic tensions, poor infrastructure, and coercive regional authority in Myanmar – or better yet, to include in this discussion other nations, like Bangladesh, that also disenfranchise the Rohingya ethnic group. To date, however, mainstream journalists continue to essentialize decades of conflict as Buddhist against Muslim, or Rohingya against Myanmar/Burma – complicating, if not postponing important talks from being held among diplomatic leaders in Southeast Asia. To make any sense of this crisis, and in turn, to produce any possibility of enduring reform from the government, reporters must consider not just the Rakhine state but Burma's entire history, its modes of governance, its ethnic and religious plurality, its military political culture, its structural development, and its long revolutionary struggle. Until then, the peoples and government of Myanmar will likely maintain their centuries-old instinct to defend their nation from attack (or here, "bullying") long before candid talks and pragmatic reforms can be instituted.

Bibliography

Scholarly Articles and Books

Aung, Maung Htin. *A History of Burma*. New York: Columbia UP, 1967. Print.

Aung-Thwin, Michael A. *Myth and History in the Historiography of Early Burma: Paradigms, Primary Sources, and Prejudices*. Athens, OH: Center for International Studies at Ohio University, 1998. Print.

--------- "Parochial Universalism, Democracy *Jihad,* and the Orientalist Image of Burma," in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (2002). Print.

Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publishers, 1995. Print.

Bo, Bo. "Raising Xenophobic Socialism against a Communist Threat," in *Cultures at War*, ed. Tony Day and Maya H.T. Liem (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2010),

Brac de la Perrière, Bénédicte. "The Spirit-possession Cult in the Burmese Religion." Paris: CNRS-LASEMA, 2008. Online article. http://www.dhammaweb.net/books/Cult_in_Burmese_Religion.pdf. Accessed online 16 May 2015.

Callahan, Mary. *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2003. Print.

---------- *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation, and Coexistence* from *Policy Studies,* No. 31 (Southeast Asia). Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2007. Print.

Gutter, Peter. "Law and Religion in Burma," in *Legal Issues on Burma Journal*, No. 8. April 2001. Online article. http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/LIOB08-pgutter.law%20andreligion.htm. Accessed online 31 May 2015.

Guyot, James F. "Burma in 1988 - *Perestroika* with a Military Face," in *Southeast Asian Affairs*. Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989. Print.

Hodgson, Godfrey. *America in our Time: From World War II to Nixon – What Happened and Why*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978. Print.

Jordt, Ingrid. *Burma's Mass Lay Meditation Movement: Buddhism and the Cultural Construction of Power*. Athens, OH: Center for International Studies at Ohio University, 2007. Print.

Kyaw, Aye. *The Voice of Young Burma*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993. Print.

Larsson, Thomas. "Monkish Politics in Southeast Asia," in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014. Print.

Myint, U Thant. *The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. Print.

Rogers, Benedict. *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010. Print.

Schober, Juliane. *Modern Buddhist Conjunctures in Myanmar: Cultural Narratives, Colonial Legacies, and Civil Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2011. Print.

Steinberg, David I. *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print

--------- *Turmoil in Burma: Contested Legacies in Myanmar*. Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2007. Print.

Tin, Pe Maung and Luce, G.H., trans. "Of the journey to the Tarop country in the kingdom of Gandhala, and the asking of the sacred tooth," in *Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976. Print.

Additional Sources

"Biography: Shwe Mann, Burma's Dictator-in-Waiting." American Embassy at Rangoon. 16 March 2007. Internal memo, released by WikiLeaks 13 April 2012. https://wikileaks.org/cable/2007/03/07RANGOON283.html. Accessed online 13 May 2015.

"Burma," in *CIA World Factbook*. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2005. Online database.

"Burma," in *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*. U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Online report. Accessed online 13 April 2015.

"Burma General Elections Scheduled in Late 2015: Election Official." The Irrawaddy, 21 October 2014. Online article. http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burma-general-elections-scheduled-late-2015-election-official.html. Accessed online 20 May 2015.

"Burma: Rohingya Muslims Face Humanitarian Crisis." Human Rights Watch, 26 March 2013. Web. http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/26/burma-rohingya-muslims-face-humanitarian-crisis. Accessed online 2 June 2015.

"Burma's Kachin vote delay leaves two popular candidates out in the cold." Kachin News, 28 March 2012. Online article. http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2263-burma-s-kachin-vote-delay-leaves-two-popular-candidates-out-in-the-cold.html. Accessed online 10 May 2015.

Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. 2008. Web. http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs5/Myanmar_Constitution-2008-en.pdf. Accessed online 18 May 2015.

"Ethnic Nationalities of Burma." Oxford Burma Alliance. Web. http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/ethnic-groups.html. Accessed online 28 May 2015.

Hume, Tim. "Myanmar gives Rohingya voting rights, backtracks immediately." CNN, 12 February 2015. Online article. http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/12/asia/myanmar-rohingya-voting-rights/. Accessed online 10 May 2015.

Inside Burma: Land of Fear. Dir. David Munro. By John Pilger. Central Independent Television, 1996. Documentary.

"Malaysia sends four ships to look for stranded migrants." Al Jazeera, 22 May 2015. Online article. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/malaysia-sends-ships-stranded-migrants-150522012714349.html. Accessed online 22 May 2015.

"Myanmar government and rebels agree on ceasefire draft." Al Jazeera, 1 April 2015. Online article. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/03/myanmar-government-rebels-reach-ceasefire-deal150331194752849.html. Accessed online 28 April 2015.

"Myanmar prisoners kept in 'dog-cells' after protests." Amnesty International, 3 June 2011. Online article. http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/myanmar-prisoners-kept-in-%E2%80%98dog-cells-after-protests. Accessed online 17 May 2015.

"Regime Watch 2011-2015." *ALTSEAN Burma*. Alternative Asean Network on Burma, May 2015. Web. Accessed online 28 May 2015.

Schatz, Joseph. "In Myanmar, attacking the Rohingya is good politics." Al Jazeera*,* 29 May 2015. Online article. http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/5/29/in-myanmar-attacking-the-rohingya-is-good-politics.html. Accessed online 2 June 2015.

"Speaker Confirmed as New USDP Chairman." The Myanmar Times. 6 May 2013. Online article. http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/6629-speaker-confirmed-as-new-usdp-chairman.html. Accessed online 28 April 2015.

"Suu Kyi does not rule out alliance with Shwe Mann." Democratic Voice of Burma, 8 May 2015. Online article. http://www.dvb.no/news/suu-kyi-does-not-rule-out-alliance-with-shwe-mann-burma-myanmar/50668. Accessed online 17 May 2015.

"The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment." Burma Socialist Programme Party, 17 January 1963. Web. Accessed online 29 May 2015.

Tallentire, Mark. "The Burma Road to Ruin." The Guardian, 28 September 2007. Online article. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/28/burma.uk. Accessed online 18 May 2015.

"U Ne Win." Bio. A&E Television Networks, 2015. Web. 22 May 2015

"UN condemns Myanmar monk Wirathu's 'sexist' comments." BBC. 22 January 2015. Online article. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30928744. Accessed online 13 April 2015.

Wikimedia Commons. "Panthay mosque." Photo. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Panthay_mosque.JPG. Accessed online 2 June 2015.

Win, Than Tun. "Composition of the Different Ethnic Groups under the 8 Major National Ethnic Races in Myanmar." Embassy of Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Brussels. Web. http://www.embassyofmyanmar.be/ABOUT/ethnicgroups.htm. Accessed online 28 May 2015.